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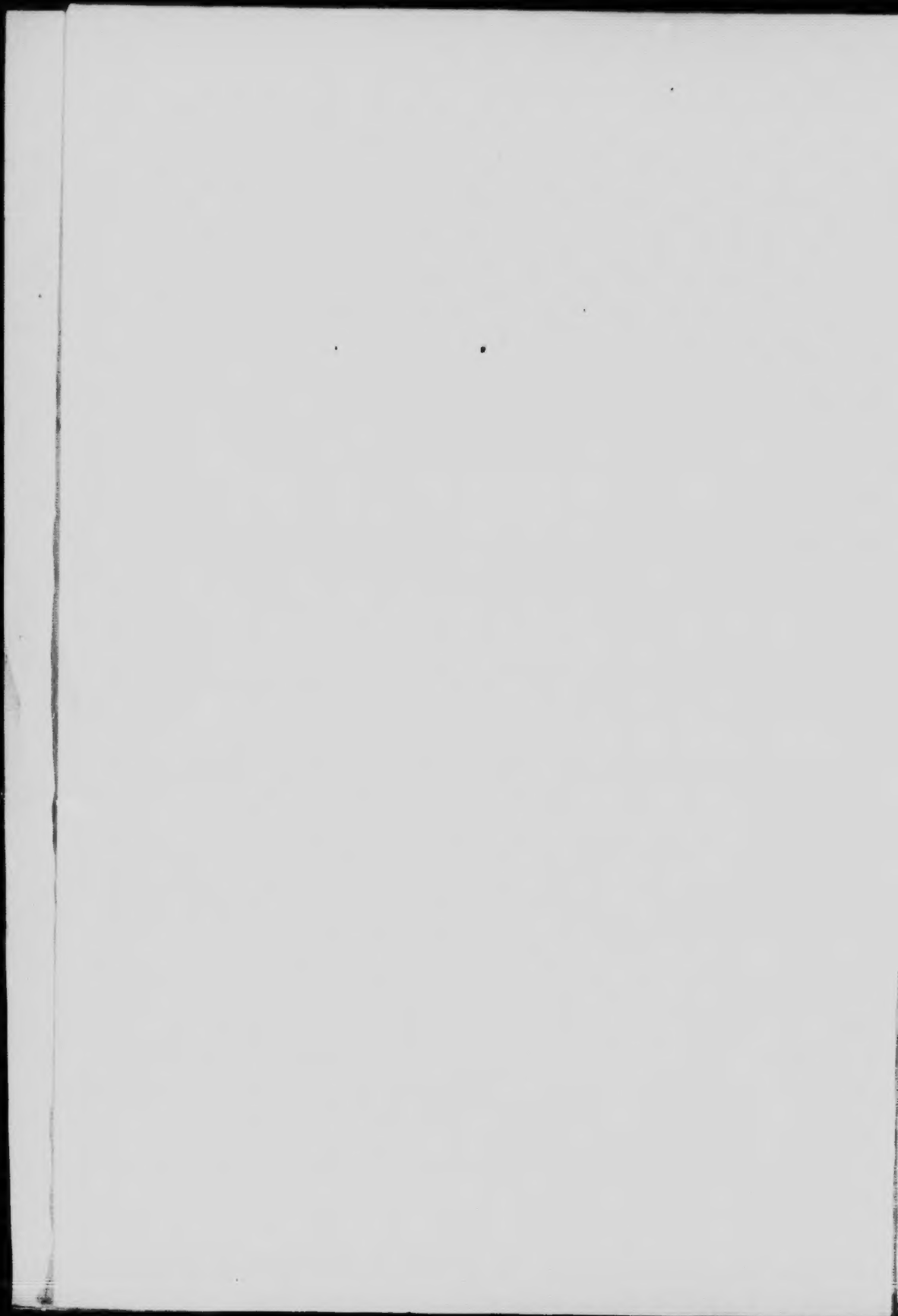
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THE GERMANS
I
THEIR EMPIRE
HOW THEY HAVE MADE IT

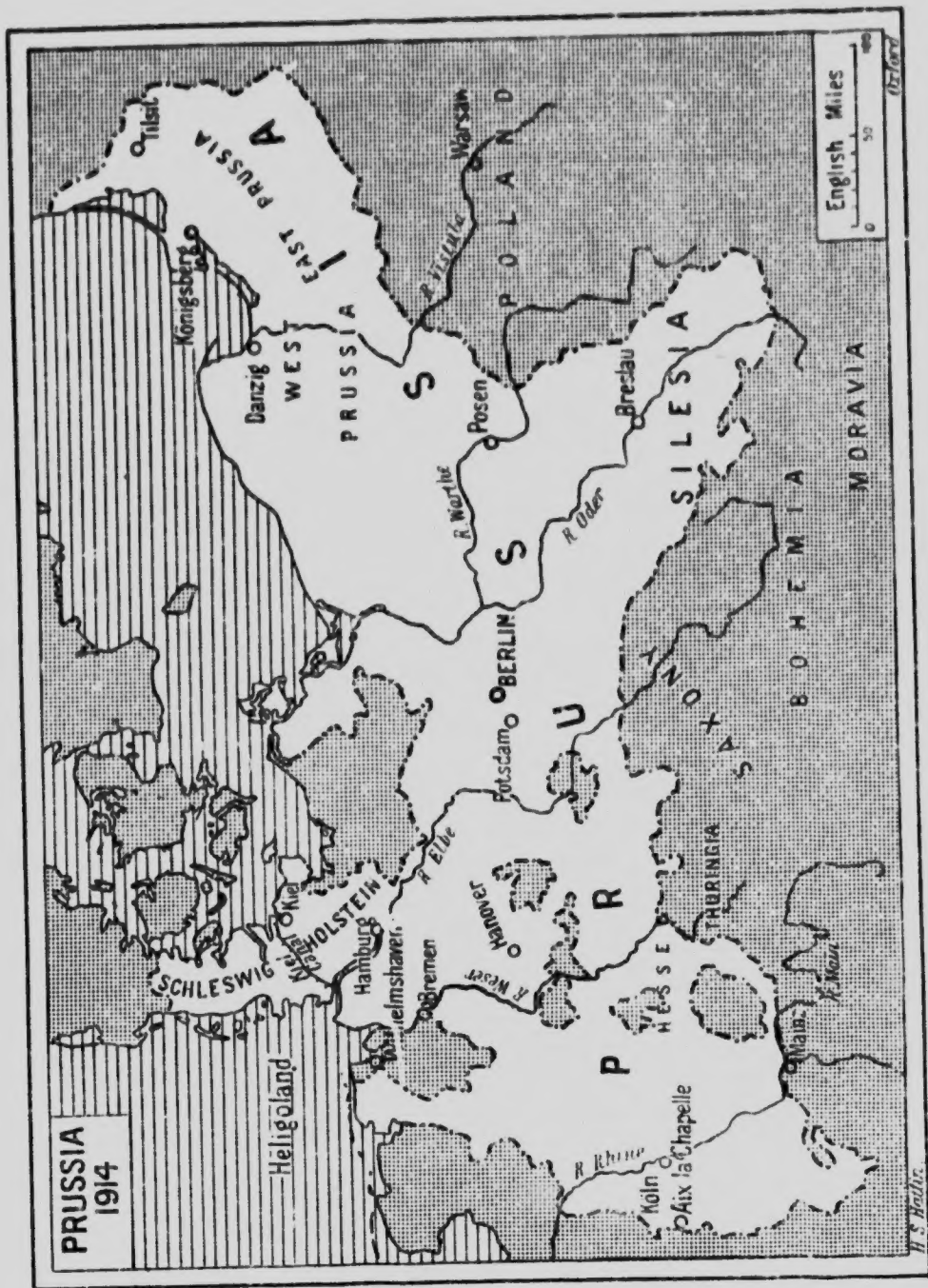
By C. R. L. FLETCHER

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THE GERMANS, THEIR EMPIRE AND HOW THEY HAVE MADE IT

PART I

I HAVE been asked to put down briefly and in homely language some account of the German Empire, how it grew to be what it is to-day, and what its present aims and its present temper are. The simplest and, I think, the truest way of putting the case is, that the present temper, and the present and recent aims of the rulers of the German Empire do not at all fairly represent the aims and temper of the great majority of the German people in normal times. Nothing shall persuade me that the German people as a whole (I know hardly anything of the governing classes or the professional soldiers of Germany) wanted this war. But I fear that they have been blown up by those governing classes into a sort of madness which has made them believe that they wanted it. They are, as a people, intensely patriotic—one might almost say their only God is the 'Fatherland', for even the best of them are strangely untouched in their daily lives by any ordinary religious feelings. They are also intensely patient and laborious, full of the 'domestic virtues', and yet admirably drilled to fight. There is in most of them a curious vein of sentimentality, which often makes them ready to accept, as true, ideals and ideas which are in reality false. Some people used to say that Germans saw everything 'distorted through a haze of tobacco-smoke and philosophy'. I think it is quite possible (for their newspapers

are almost wholly controlled by their Government, and are most unscrupulously made to tell lies for its ends) that a majority of the German people really believe that they have now been attacked quite wantonly by France, Russia, and England.

Not only their newspapers but also their schools and universities are wholly in the hands of their Government; all professors and schoolmasters are salaried State-agents; and all know that their promotion, and even the retention of the places they hold, depend on their teaching and preaching exactly what the Government wishes. I can't speak for their priests or other ministers of religion, but so far as I know, in the Protestant parts of Germany no one listens to them or goes to their churches, and not many well-educated people do so in the Catholic parts. But the average German believes in culture, and soaks himself in it to a far higher degree than the average Englishman. I have sometimes thought that the German gets his culture a little too cheap; for it is better that the highest things should come to us after some effort made by ourselves than that we should be spoon-fed with them by the State.

In one at least of the arts, and that one of the highest, namely music, Germany has been for two centuries supreme, and three-fourths of Germans are truly musical and music-loving. And in every little town of three or four thousand people the best music is to be heard constantly, publicly, and almost for nothing. In the other arts, like painting and sculpture, the Germans excel in details but are wanting in inspiration. In poetry, in philosophy, in history, and in every branch of science, they may claim equality with, if not superiority to, any nation in the world. Then

they are also a great manufacturing nation, with rich iron-works and steel-works, especially in the countries just east of the Rhine, and a great corn-growing and wood-growing and grass-growing nation. Above all they are the most expert merchants in the world ; the German commercial traveller knows three languages for the English traveller's one, and he pushes his wares everywhere.

In private life there is one striking difference between the Germans and ourselves, and it is this : in England the gentlemen wait upon the ladies, in Germany the ladies wait upon the gentlemen. The difference is, I think, in our favour ; it is not a pretty sight to see a burly professor, however deep his culture, sitting and drinking his beer and smoking a very rank cigar at his dinner table, while his wife constantly gets up to pour him out another glass or to fetch him another cigar. The quantity of beer (light and wholesome indeed compared to English beer) that a German will drink is perfectly incredible ; incredible also is the number of cheap cigars he will consume in a day. He seems to need very little exercise and to take almost none ; he begins his day's work much earlier than we do, and, if he is at all well-to-do, knocks off much earlier ; but he spends most of his evenings in beer-gardens, or at concerts to the accompaniment of more beer. Even the schoolboys play few games and do not care for them ; on the other hand, they do a great deal of exceedingly useful gymnastics, which form part of the compulsory programme of work in every school.

You will think, then, that it is strange that a nation with all these natural aptitudes for the arts of peace, and for the enjoyment of the modest pleasures of a quiet life, should be so willing to plunge into war at the bidding of a few, or a comparatively few, very wicked individuals.

And I am bound to admit that, till 1911, I never could bring myself to believe that they, or indeed any nation claiming to be civilized and to be one of the European family, would ever again enter upon a war of pure aggression for merely selfish ends. If for no other reason, the risk that the aggressor must inevitably run seemed to be too impossibly great. To use a sporting phrase, a nation acting in this way would be backing itself at too long odds. It shall be my business, in a second paper, to try to explain why Germany has dared to lay such enormously long odds on herself against Fortune. Meanwhile, it may be useful to remember that there are about sixty-five millions of these sober steadfast people, and that their country is situated in the centre of Europe, with only a very short bit of coast-line facing *open* water (for you can hardly call the Baltic open water). That open water is the very dangerous and sandy North Sea. They feel themselves strangled, and they want more room and more ports.

My earliest recollections of infancy carry me back to the days of that first serious effort of Prussia, then, as now, the leading military power of Germany, to open a larger window to the sea; I refer to the shameless game of grab which she played on Denmark in 1864. Nominally Austria and the other States of Germany were playing on her side; but they were only dragged into it, and Prussia was really 'centre-forward', 'half-back', and 'full-back' also in the game. I remember how passionately Danish we children were; my nurse sewed me a little Danish flag which I wore over my heart, and we sang a nursery rhyme about 'poor doggie Denmark with never a bone'. The Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein were the two choice bones which the Prussian mastiff then stole from the dear little Danish terrier (who fought

most gallantly but was hopelessly beaten). These duchies had belonged to the Danes ever since the time of our King Canute, eight hundred years ago ; and it was Canute who had wrenched them from a peculiarly hard-fisted German Kaiser. The pretexts upon which Prussia acted in 1864 are unimportant and would not interest my readers ; but both then and now it was and is universally admitted that she had not a shadow of *right* upon her side, and acted simply as a strong robber. It was a part which for two hundred years she had been well accustomed to play.

What was her object ? it was to get to bluer water. The only water that Prussia then *legally* controlled on the open sea was at the port of Emden, in the old duchy of East Friesland (a Prussian theft of 1744) at the back of Holland, and there the water is, from the great line of sand-banks outside, more brown than blue. Hamburg and Bremen, at the mouths respectively of the Elbe and the Weser (themselves by no means too blue), were not then Prussian cities, but free members of a curious body of States called the Germanic, Confederation. Naturally enough Denmark has not forgotten or forgiven the theft of her duchies, whose population, still largely of Danish blood, is compelled to learn the supremacy of the Kaiser as an article of faith, and even to sing 'patriotic' German songs to celebrate the glories of Germany.

You see I have begun with this particular theft because it was the one which made a deep impression on my own mind in childhood. But we must now go back a bit ; and we shall see that such a theft was by no means a new thing in Prussian history. The present royal family of Prussia had ruled in the sandy flats of Brandenburg, whose capital city is Berlin, since 1415,

and an iron race of rulers they had proved themselves to be. They and all other German princes and States were members of a body called the 'Holy Roman Empire'; this body had claimed, as far back as the year 800, to be in some mysterious way the successor of the real old Roman Empire, which had virtually come to an end in Western Europe in 476, though a shadow of it lingered in the East at Constantinople till 1453, when the Turks overthrew it. When we are thinking about the Middle Ages we commonly speak of this strange league of German States as 'the Empire', and sometimes as 'the German Empire'. As a witty Frenchman once said, 'it was not an Empire at all, it had nothing Roman about it, and it certainly wasn't Holy.'

There were no 'natural' frontiers to Brandenburg; so the saying ran that it must always have a 'frontier of men', that is, an army out of all proportion to its scanty population. Its rulers were called 'Electors' of Brandenburg long before they were called Kings; and when, in 1701, they got the title of 'King', they called themselves not 'Kings of Brandenburg' (for that would have offended the sentiment of the conservative Germany of those days) but 'Kings of Prussia', a duchy far away to the east on the Russian border, which these Electors had appropriated by two most adroit tricks in 1525 and 1618.¹ The last of the Electors who was not a King, Frederick William, called the 'Great Elector', grabbed right and left, and to the four points of the compass; and in his reign (1640-88) the map of Prussia began to resemble the outstretched wings of a headless and tailless bird of prey. Berlin lay somewhere

¹ The crowning-place of the Prussian kings is still at Königsberg in Eastern Prussia, a city which our good Russian friends are besieging while I write (Sept. 9, 1914).

about the place where the heart would have been if Prussia had possessed one. It was the son of this man, called Frederick I, who took the royal title; and it was Frederick's son, Frederick William I (1713-40), who was the real founder of the modern Prussian army. He had a passion for collecting very tall soldiers—the regiment of 'Potsdam giants'—he would give almost any sum for a man eight feet high, and he employed agents all over Europe to kidnap these giants for him. His contemporaries thought that

'he only made himself and royal Pots-
—dam silly';

in fact they thought him mad. But there was a method in his madness. If he invented the ridiculous goose-step, the tight uniform, the savage punishments by cruel drill-sergeants, and all the other military devices for turning an intelligent citizen into a clockwork machine, and strangling his mind as well as his body, Frederick William also got out of this machinery perfect obedience, and perfect movements of large bodies of men together; and he taught his machine its lesson so thoroughly that, when it came to be used in war, it knew exactly what to do and did it at the right time. It also knew that its officers and drill-sergeants would shoot it if it fell back, so on the whole it was safer to go forward. So successful was this Prussian army in the next reign that all European Powers, by no means to their own profit, took, at one time or another, to copying it; we are not wholly quit of its baleful influence yet. And moreover, we must not hastily despise it: a *measure* of machinery is necessary for all armies, and perfect obedience is absolutely necessary for all. Against unintelligent armies who have *not* got this machinery, the Prussian system is bound to carry everything before

it. But against armies of intelligent men, like our own and the French, it can only succeed by mere weight of numbers, and at the most appalling cost to itself. Let us hope that it is on its last trial at this moment, and will never reappear again.

King Frederick William I was so fond of this wonderful army of his, that he never or hardly ever used it in battle ; and his reign is honourably distinguished in Prussian history by the fact that he grabbed very little from his neighbours. He died in 1740, and his son, Frederick II (1740-86), was a very different sort of fellow. Most people have heard something of him by the name of ' Frederick the Great '. The famous Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle wrote, in the middle of the last century, a ' History of Frederick the Great ' ; it is a truly wonderful book, and I confess to being very fond of reading it. But its author believed too much in the doctrine of ' strong men ', almost in ' strong-men-at-any-price ', and you may remember that he also made a hero out of that arch-bully Napoleon. Frederick II might truly be called ' the Great ', from his careful husbandry of the resources of his country, from his scrupulous care for her commercial and agricultural interests, from his own frugality, toleration, and industry, from his justice to his own civilian subjects. But it was not these things that procured him the title from his contemporaries ; rather it was the fact that, having shamelessly set himself to grab the property of his weaker neighbours, he knew how to defend his thefts by feats of arms which astonished his own generation and remain memorable even to our own.

His first and most shameless theft, for which even he pleaded no excuse, was that of the rich province of Silesia, which he took from Austria in 1740 ; and this acquisition

added the tail, on the map, to the Prussian bird of prey. He fought and won three great wars for its defence. We English hated him cordially at first, and he was helped by the French, then, and for long after, our rivals and enemies. But he was quite ready to betray these allies, and the result was that in 1756 the French helped the Austrians against him, and so we, for our own safety, were obliged to help Frederick. So came about the famous 'Seven Years' War' (1756-63), which finally secured Silesia for Prussia, and gave us Canada and the victory over the French in India. We then called Frederick the 'Protestant Hero' (he was, by the way, an avowed atheist and openly scoffed at religion); and when you see a public-house with the sign of the 'King of Prussia' over it you may be pretty sure that it dates back to the middle of the eighteenth century. Frederick was not in the least grateful; he complained because we would not go on fighting just as long as suited his convenience, and hated us heartily till the day of his death.

It was he also who suggested the famous crime of the First Partition of Poland (1772), which is at the root of much of the Eastern troubles of Germany to-day. Poland was at that time, with the exception of Russia, the largest country on the map of Europe. But it was miserably poor, it had a scanty and down-trodden population, and was ridiculously governed by a lot of greedy nobles, whose habit was to elect as king the weakest man they could find. So, Prussia leading the way, the three Eastern Powers, Prussia, Russia, and Austria, each grabbed a piece of this hapless country, leaving a mutilated carcass in the middle, which was to be divided later on. Austria got the richest, the only rich piece, Galicia, out of which the Russians are turning her while I write; there are valuable mines

and salt-works in Galicia. Prussia got the most convenient piece, a strip on the Baltic coast, which completed, or almost completed, the right wing of the bird of prey. Russia alone had any sort of excuse for her theft, for the Poles, though Roman Catholic in religion, were of Slavonic race, and Russia is the natural head of all the Slavonic races of Europe. Two other partitions of the carcass of Poland followed, in 1793 and 1795, and at the last of them it was declared that 'Poland has ceased to exist'. You might as well say that Belgium has 'ceased to exist' because the Germans have conquered it and wasted it to-day. The Polish people certainly did not cease to exist, and have cried to Heaven for revenge, especially on Prussia, ever since. Austria on the whole has treated the conquered Poles fairly well, and Galicia has not been unhappy under her rule. Russia, too long swayed by German influence and example, has treated them badly, although the Russian Emperor, Alexander I, after defeating Napoleon (1812), got a good deal of Poland back from Austria and Prussia (1815), and wanted to rule the whole as a constitutional king; but his Germanized soldier-statesmen would not allow him to be too merciful. Prussia at the beginning of the period 1772-1914, and again at the end of it, for the last forty years especially, has treated them infamously (she was not so cruel from 1815 to 1870), simply turning them out of their lands to make room for German colonists. This fact will not be forgotten when our allies in the grey greatcoats get to Posen, the capital city of Prussian Poland; and the Tsar has now solemnly promised to restore to the Polish people the whole of their old kingdom, and all the liberty they desire, under Russian protection, and not to lay down his arms till he has done so. Russia, is in fact, now as much the champion of

the oppressed Slavs in the East as the French and English are of the oppressed Belgians in the West.

Soon after the death of Frederick the Great of Prussia came the famous French Revolution of 1789; and in 1792 began the twenty-three-year-long war that resulted from it. During those years France was, at one time or another, at war with every great State and with nearly every little State of Europe; and I am afraid that she trampled on, and extinguished the independence of, every little State she could reach. But, though she did these things, she had at first some plausible pretext, if not some excuse. She had risen in 1789 against her own Government, not because it was on the whole tyrannous or oppressive (which it was not), but because it was ridiculously behind the times, ridiculously inefficient, and so clumsily worked that it involved a lot of little oppressions and injustices to particular classes, interests, and individuals. Frenchmen were far ahead of other nations in intelligence, and they could not stand the mere *stupidity* of the old system any longer. Also they wanted a guarantee against possible oppression, some form of parliamentary government, a full measure of what we in England call 'common-law rights', and equal taxation. As is usual in revolutions, and especially French revolutions, they went much too far, went in fact to absurd extremes, killed their innocent well-meaning young king, committed a lot of abominable crimes, and overthrew many venerable things which they had better have preserved.

They were so much in love with their own new ideas that they thought they could make themselves, and all the rest of mankind, happy for ever by proclaiming a few simple principles of 'natural law' and attempting to put them in practice. Soon they began to cry out to their

neighbours across the Rhine and in Belgium, 'Go and do likewise; overthrow your Governments, and you will be happy for ever; let us all dance round the tree of liberty.' These proceedings irritated and not unnaturally frightened the German princes, many of whose States really were tyrannously governed; and so Prussia led the way in a sort of 'crusade' against these new principles of liberty which France was practising and preaching. Austria, slow, dogged old creature, much as she hated her Prussian neighbours, felt bound to follow suit. Then France blazed up in amazing wrath, and proclaimed herself a Republic. Her defence of her frontier, heroic enough on land (1792-4), was the more heroic when, from February 1793, the weight of the British fleet was thrown into the scale against her at sea. What, you will ask, what in the name of Freedom, were *we* doing in a coalition with those stupid German tyrants against a gallant people, striving first for its own freedom and then proclaiming freedom to all peoples from the house-tops?

Stop! we were doing then very much what we are doing to-day; *we were defending the public law of Europe*. France, in her impetuous enthusiasm for her new-found liberty, declared that she cared nothing for treaties; she was going to tear them all up, and would compel the Belgians, the Dutch, and the West-Germans to form themselves into little republics under French protection. 'What!' cried these dear passionate apostles of freedom, 'you don't want to be republicans? you don't want to upset your own infamous kings?' (by this time Frenchmen had got to believe all kings to be infamous creatures; they called our good old George III, a bull-dog Briton if ever there was one, a 'gory tyrant', and all other names they could think

of) 'then, by Heaven, we'll make you do so. You shall eat liberty at the point of the bayonet, we will choke you with freedom.' Well, naturally, this was too much for a sober, quiet, law-abiding people like the English; and the tearing up of European treaties, together with the French threat to our oldest allies the Dutch, produced immediate war. With the interval of two years, 1801-3, that war lasted for twenty-two years; and at the end of it even Napoleon, when beaten, called the British 'the most constant, the most generous of his foes'.

Alas! there is a great deal of human nature even in apostles of Freedom. The French soon forgot the missionary part of their business, but the pleasure of conquering other peoples remained. For a long time, however, they *professed* they were trying to benefit the peoples they attacked. 'We are coming for all your goods,' they cried to us. 'Yes, damn you! and for our chattels too,' replied the British. But they never came here, though they kept us long a-quake with the threat that they would come. Old Lord St. Vincent once growled out in the House of Lords, 'I don't say the French can't come to England; I only say they can't come by sea.'

They got to most other countries during those terrible years; and they played with the maps of Germany and Italy as a child plays with the pieces of a puzzle-map, and made and re-made them at their good pleasure. At last they broke. They broke against two great nations; the one Spain, an old nation with a glorious past, a very weak and absurd government, but a people passionately devoted to its independence and its flag; the other Russia, then a comparatively new-comer into the European family, extraordinarily backward, but deeply religious and patriotic. 'Holy Mother

Russia ' girded her slow strength and hurled the impious invader back across her own snows :

How far is St. Helena from the Beresina ice ?
An ill way, a chill way, the ice begins to crack.¹

During all these wars whenever there was a State, small or great, to be defended against French aggression, Great Britain constantly poured gold and supplies into its lap. She was able to do this solely because her fleet could keep the sea and could throttle the trade of France and of her dependants. She was far too slow, then as always, to send her own sons to fight ; her army was ridiculously small, though larger, in proportion to her population, than it was when the present war opened ; but she kept on adding and adding to that gallant little army, and in the last years was able to send quite a respectable number of men across the seas.

It is a very much more dangerous and infinitely more savage enemy that we have to meet now. Bloody and cruel deeds were occasionally done in hot blood during the old wars, and by the armies of all nations, our own included ; but I am sure that, between 1793 and 1815, no such horrors were ever perpetrated by any army *on a system and by order* as have been perpetrated by the Germans in Belgium during the last five weeks. No one then, not even Turks, cut the wrist-sinews of wounded soldiers. or drove screens of women, children, and old men before them into battle ; no one fired upon hospitals, or ill-treated the doctors or nurses at the front ; no deed like the destruction of Louvain, nothing like the bombardment of other unresisting, unfortified towns (after they had been evacuated by hostile troops)

¹ Napoleon's worst disaster on his winter retreat from Russia happened at the passage of the river Beresina. Within three years from that date he was a prisoner at St. Helena.

has been done, so far as I can recall, for nearly 300 years in Europe; if submarine mines had been invented, none of the maritime powers of the old war days would have strewn them on peaceful trade-routes. In particular the French and English, when they met, always fought each other like gentlemen, and cared humanely each for the other's wounded. How many tales our grandfathers, who fought in those wars, used to tell of the soldiers of the two armies meeting, on outpost duty in a wood, or at horse watering on opposite sides of some Spanish river, and exchanging courtesies and good-humoured chaff in the intervals of having to exchange musket shots. God help us all, those days seem to be past, and we are faced with a foe for whom the laws, not to speak of the courtesies, of civilized warfare have ceased to exist! But let us make no mistake; Germans officers and German privates are not acting thus because they are naturally more cruel than other soldiers; but because they have been ordered to do it on system, to strike terror into the *people* of their enemies. The systematic destruction of Belgian cities is for the same purpose. The Kaiser's advisers (I don't believe it is the Kaiser himself who is to blame; I don't even believe he wanted to go to war, but his brutal military party and his cold-blooded financiers drove him to it) have told their army that, by striking such terror, they will end the war the more quickly. Let us hope that they have made here the most foolish as well as the most wicked of their mistakes. And let us beware lest, when our turn comes to drive them back over the Rhine, over the Weser, over the Elbe, we do not imitate their awful example. We must show ourselves Christian soldiers and Christian gentlemen; we must let the penalty of the war fall in full measure

only on those few who made it, on the German Government, not on the German people, or on the venerable monuments of German antiquity.

But to return to my task : what was Prussia doing during the twenty-three years of war between new France and old Europe ? Prussia had begun this war in 1792 ; she was the first to scuttle out of it, and to scuttle out for a price, in 1795. She then concluded a separate peace, getting for herself a little more territory east of the Lower Rhine, and a promise of neutrality, while the French were settling with her ally Austria on the Upper Rhine. Into that neutrality during the next eleven years, 1795-1806, she sank deeper and deeper, and buried her head, ostrich-like, in the sands of Brandenburg ; keeping, however, always ready to pop up whenever any other power made a treaty with France which might possibly lead to a few more crumbs of German territory falling into her own mouth. Several such crumbs actually did fall, and the left wing of the Prussian bird of prey was all but completed before 1806. While Prussia was hiding her head, France grew and grew ; grew from the desperate Republic on the defensive to the triumphant Republic on the aggressive, from the Republic to the Consulate (1799), from the Consulate to the Empire (1804) under the lead of the greatest soldier of all history, Napoleon Bonaparte. The curious thing is that Prussia was still *believed* to be a great power, and the fame of the great Frederick was still protecting her ; her army was still believed by others, as well as by herself, to be invincible. Power after power knelt to her, and implored her to come forward and strike a blow to liberate Europe from the French ; but all she did was to say to France, ' What will you give me *not* to come forward ? Will you give me

Pomerania ? Saxony ? Mecklenburg ? oh ! *will* you give Hanover ? ' Napoleon, who of course saw through all this, estimated Prussia at her true worth, entrapped her into committing an appalling crime of treachery against Austria and Russia until he had smashed these powers at Austerlitz (1805), and meanwhile tossed Hanover to her as a bone to a greedy dog. Prussia lay down and licked his boots.

But it happened that, in the next year, it suited Napoleon to make an offer of Hanover back to England (Hanover was then the family property of our George III) in return for peace, which he thought we might be induced to conclude ; and Prussia found this out. To have the price of her treachery torn from her, before she had well occupied it, was too much even for her. She flung off her neutrality ; and Napoleon, whose army was just then at the height of its perfection, smashed her to bits in two battles on the same day. And that was the end of *old* Prussia ; and one can hardly help saying that she got her deserts.

The years that immediately follow, 1806-15, are the real hero-time of Prussia. The conqueror ground her to the earth and imposed humiliation after humiliation upon her ; he clipped off her two wings and parcelled them out to more submissive dependents, he threatened to clip off her tail as well ; he reduced her army to 42,000 men and compelled it to serve him in 1812 in his mad enterprise against Russia. The country was indeed purified through suffering, and threw up one or two really able statesmen, who began (they had to work very much in secrecy at first) to heal her wounds. They introduced a few (too few) steps in the direction of greater freedom for civilians ; and they introduced the system of short service for their little army, so that, though

only 42,000 men were enrolled at any given moment, every two years another 42,000 were trained, and thus there was a large reserve upon which to draw. The result was that, when Napoleon was beaten in Russia, there was a 'nation in arms' (and mad for vengeance) to catch him on his way home in 1813. That nation carried its slow, vacillating, timid king off his feet and played (1813-15) the chief part, after England and Russia, in the overthrow of the French Empire.

And in 1815 Prussia claimed the reward she had so fairly earned. She gave up, indeed, a good deal of Poland to Russia, and she got half Saxony instead; but her great gains came on the West, for she acquired the whole of Westphalia (now the 'black country' of Germany, where the great iron-works are and where those terrible Krupp guns are made); and above all she got both banks of the middle Rhine, of which river she was henceforth to be the guardian. Austria, on the other hand, who had borne, for an infinitely longer time, the burden of the resistance to France (she had fought four successive times, and hardly ever acknowledged that she was beat) took her rewards far away in Italy; where, I am sorry to say, she soon became the typical German tyrant, hated if ever tyrant was hated by the Italians.¹ Austria thus practically ceased to be a German power, though both she and Prussia remained nominally members of a Germanic Confederation (1815-66) which included thirty-nine separate German States, with a federal assembly to regulate it. Some of these States were of considerable size, like Bavaria, Würtemberg, Baden, Saxony, and Hanover; others were merely

¹ The Italians, somehow or other, thirty-two years ago, allowed themselves to be bamboozled into a Triple Alliance with Austria and Germany, out of which they have got no good whatever.

ridiculous 'Counts of Schnippy-Schnappenhausen'. Now Prussia was not popular among the peoples of these little German States, who wanted to drink their beer, and listen to their divine music, and write their deep books on philosophy like good peaceable men; and these men said from the first that Prussia meant to be too masterful. Prussia, for her part, did not like it when some of the other German princes introduced free government into their States; she liked it still less when she was compelled to introduce some parody of free government into her own State after a real popular rising in Berlin in 1848. And all the little States were inclined to look for support against Prussia towards poor old Austria,¹ who, by the way, hated free government almost more than Prussia did, and had a much worse revolution of her own in 1848. The result was that the secret jealousy and hostility between Austria and Prussia was prolonged and grew more bitter down to 1866.

The forty-nine years which came after 1815 were, however, on the whole peaceful and prosperous for all Germany; and they produced a nation which was eminently peaceful, frugal, and learned — till 1870. Parliamentary government, not wholly unlike our own, grew up in most of the States and there was a Customs-union (*Zollverein*) for all Germany. Alone, in the far north-east one group of German families remained discontented with the new state of things; these were the old

¹ It is worth noting that the wisest of Prussian statesmen, Baron vom Stein, actually wished in 1815 to revive the old German Empire, which Napoleon had extinguished in 1806, and put its crown, not on the head of his own master the King of Prussia, but on that of the Austrian sovereign, who had worn it for nearly four hundred years, 1438–1806.

aristocracy of the poor sandy heaths of Brandenburg and Pomerania, and of the rich grass- and corn-lands of East Prussia. Such men had their roots deep in the soil, and grew to hardy manhood under the inclement skies of the Baltic shore. Culture in the German (or in any other) sense they had absolutely none, and desired none ; freedom they hated ; parliamentary government they despised ; riches alone, and principally the riches of other people, they coveted. Their ideals were, and remain, those of the days of Frederick the Great, the ideals of conquest, of war for its own sake, the ideals of ' blood and steel '. These are the men we are fighting now, and we shall find them a hard nut to crack. They had little political influence in Germany until they found a leader of supreme brain-power and utter unscrupulousness in Otto von Bismarck, by birth (he was born in Waterloo year) one of themselves. Gradually, under his guidance, they became the leading influence in the parliament of the Prussian kingdom ; and he himself got considerable influence in the Federal Assembly which, materially strengthened after the events of 1848, sat for the whole German Confederation at Frankfort.

In many ways the spirit of such men is invaluable to a nation, and there is much that is very noble in that spirit. It is not unlike the spirit of old Rome. Rome conquered the world, and with the sword ; and it is impossible to deny that she undertook, piece by piece, that world-conquest at first for selfish aims. But wherever she went she brought peace, order, the greatest system of law the world ever knew, and also, what we are too apt to forget, the learning and light (almost a divine light) of Greek culture, very close in the wake of her armies. She *did* civilize the world, and to her protecting

care of the Christian faith, as well as of law and order, Europe and America owe it that their civilization is both purer and more firmly rooted than the older civilizations of China and India.

But these modern Prussian imitators of the old Romans have nothing behind the sword to bring to the conquered peoples; they do not offer 'liberty to all peoples' as the French Revolutionists did, nor Greek learning as the old Romans did, nor even a purer religion which the early Mohammedan conquerors honestly believed they were offering. No; they are 'coming for our goods and our chattels too', and for nothing else. They are coming to get the ports of Belgium and Holland, yes, and the ports of Great Britain too, that they may compel all the world to buy cheap German manufactures and nothing but cheap German manufactures. They are coming to get our colonies, which are filled with Germans because no German will go to their own. They are coming to get the iron-mines of Eastern France, because their own are not sufficient to supply the workshops of Western Germany. They are also coming for enormous sums in sheer hard cash, which, if they are victorious, they will call 'war-indemnities'. They have already demanded eight millions sterling from Brussels, which works out at about £8 per head of the population of that city. As I say to the boys whom I try to enlist in our new army, 'What do you think your lot will be, if we are beaten now?' 'Pretty uncomfortable, sir, I expect.' 'Yes,' I reply, 'you will be then a conscript in a German army sent to fight America or Japan.' For the ambition of the Prussians will not stop short at the limits of this old Europe after they have ruined it.

But—forgive me—I keep getting off the point. By

about 1860 Bismarck was the most influential statesman in Prussia, and was already dreaded and hated by the peaceable South Germans. He had thoroughly captured his King, William I, a man of quite the old-Prussian type, but so stupid as to allow himself to be led to lengths to which his own ambition would never have taken him. Bismarck was the author of the next three Prussian wars of aggression: of that which stole Schleswig-Holstein from the Danes in 1864, of that against Austria in 1866, of that with France in 1870. The story of the first of these wars ought to bring a blush to every English cheek. Why did we stand aside and let the good, brave Danes be crushed? Both honour and interest should have forbidden such a desertion of our duty, for the power that holds the sea ought always to interfere to protect a weak maritime nation against a strong land-power; and, as for our interest, the result has been that Prussia has acquired two priceless strips of coast, one on the Baltic and one on the North Sea, at the base of the Danish peninsula, has built a canal from sea to sea, and has filled all her coast-line, new and old, with arsenals, dockyards, and warships, built but for one end, namely, to wrest our colonies and our ancient heritage of sea-power from us. Please note that, on the map, the acquisition of Schleswig-Holstein gave to the Prussian bird of prey quite a new feature, a neck and a sort of head.

Four years later, Bismarck, who always saw far ahead, thought that a little blood-letting on a more serious scale was needed; and so he most wantonly attacked Austria, who was very weakly supported by the Southern German States. It was no business of ours to help Austria, but it was the business of the French, and they soon paid the penalty for neglecting to do so. To do

the French justice, they had very recently been fighting to help several of the Italian States to throw off the heavy yoke of Austria, and they were not in a particularly good temper with the latter power. Austria, whom the men of blood and steel now determined to clear completely out of Germany, had a long, and in some ways a very honourable, history; in particular she had been the bulwark of South-Eastern Europe against the Turks for several centuries. But she was sadly disunited in herself; her Emperor (poor old man, he is eighty-four this year, and has been on his throne since 1848) ruled over four separate branches of the human family—over Germans in Austria; over Hungarians, who are remote kinsmen of the Turks, in Hungary; over Slavs, who are near kinsmen of the Russians, in Poland, Bohemia, and Croatia; and over cruelly oppressed Italians in his own southern Tyrol and at the head of the Adriatic. All these he ruled from a German city, Vienna, and by German methods, which all of them disliked very much. He had lost nearly all Italy, but he still held Venice, the great port at the head of the Adriatic, and he only lost it when the war of 1866 with Bismarck began. Several of these different races had been in periodical insurrection against the Austrians; the Hungarians especially, a fine patriotic people, had given them a lively time as late as 1848 and on many previous occasions. And the Austria of 1866 was a very slow, stupid, and tired power, and the machine-made Prussian army, with its new 'needle-guns', rolled it over and over in seven weeks of war. Bismarck was wise enough not to impose hard conditions; he simply excluded Austrian influence from the remainder of Germany, set up, under the presidency of Prussia, a new Confederation which was called North German, but which

really included, very much against their will, the small South German States as well. Henceforth, as he foresaw, Austria, if she were to go on existing at all, would peaceably sink into the position of a dependent ally of Germany, and Vienna would take her orders from Berlin. This is why one is so sorry for the Austrians to-day. In the same year Bismarck annexed Hanover; 'mediatized' it, as he said, this charming diplomatic word having been invented in order to avoid calling a spade a spade or a theft a theft.

From the moment of his accession to power in Prussia there was one State with which Bismarck was careful to keep on very friendly terms, and that was Russia. He was far wiser than his successors of to-day, for he knew the strength that lay behind the river Niemen; at the same time, it was very largely his skilful and unscrupulous cajolery which led the Emperors of Russia of those days to play into the hands of Germany, and to refuse to listen to the cries for help from their own Polish cousins. And so, having freed his hands on the south and east, the wily Bismarck thought, in 1870, the time was come for his last and greatest conquest, that of France. He meant this conquest to be the signal for the re-establishment of the German Empire with its crown on the head of his own master, William I. It is humorous to learn that this crown was the very last thing old King William of Prussia desired.

France was then very weakly and badly governed by a very weak and rather bad man called the Emperor Napoleon III (1851-70). Heaven knows why he was called the third Napoleon, for there had never been a second, and most people thought the first had been more than enough. The French army was as brave and gallant as it always is, but it was shockingly

led ; and the poor Emperor lived in dread of a revolution at home, for his corrupt government was very unpopular in Paris. Everything was ready in Prussia, and the Prussian machine was perfectly equipped, with stores, guns, food, roads, railways, maps, post-offices and so on. A Hamburg friend of mine, who fought all through the last half of the war, told me that he was able to send from the front a post-card to his mother every day. In France nothing was ready, and the French staff-officers had maps of Germany but none of their own country ! The result was that a few terrible battles, in which the French displayed the most wonderful heroism under the most perfectly incompetent leaders, finished the first part of the war, that on the frontier, in a month. The South German States, little as they liked the war, had been jobbed and bribed and bullied by Bismarck into taking a hand in it ; and it is characteristic of the Prussians, that, whenever they were in a tight place, they put forward South German troops to take the worst punishment. A Bavarian professor of my acquaintance used to tell us a story of his experiences of this kind at the battle of Gravelotte : ‘ We was very much afraid of ze Frenchmen, but we was driven on by our officers. First ze colonel, he was shot down, and I feel glad ; zen our two majors, zey was both shot down, and I feel more glad ; zen, one by one, all ze ozer officers, zey all fəll, and I feel most glad ; and at last ze zenior zergeant, he step up and he cry, “ Men, I take ze command ! Backwards ! double-march ! ” and we ran like ze hare, and we never stop till we was saie in ze rear. Ach, me, I am not a war-man.’

So cleverly, however, did the Prussians move their troops that they were able to shut up several whole armies of Frenchmen in particular fortresses, and to

starve them into surrender. You will notice that, in the war that is now going on, the French army has refused to allow itself to be shut up into fortresses. If it has had to execute a great retreat, it has at least kept the open field. Well, on September 4, 1870, the Emperor Napoleon III surrendered to the Germans at Sedan, and a republic was proclaimed in Paris ; and, though it had hardly any regular army left in the field, this new government set itself first to defend Paris to the last, and secondly to *create* armies, to make armed men spring out of the sacred soil of France. Such armies did actually spring up, and occasionally hurled back the columns of the invaders. But it was all in vain ; armies cannot be created, however great the patriotism of a nation, however great the intelligence of its soldiers may be, in a few days or a few weeks ; and, when such soldiers are sent into the field untrained, only disaster after disaster can follow if they meet the *trained* forces of the enemy. Thus the new French armies of those days were able to display their own gallantry to any extent, and even to give the Prussians a great deal of trouble at particular points, but not to affect seriously the inevitable event of this terrible war. Paris, though very poorly fortified and very poorly supplied with food, was able to stand a fearful siege ; but, it too, at last had to surrender to mere famine in the spring of 1871.

It was in this war that a peculiarly repulsive habit of the Prussians showed itself, so far as I am aware, for the first time ; I mean the habit of ascribing all their victories to the direct favour of Almighty God. Now, I hold that a nation which is being attacked and is fighting for its hearth and home, for its women and babes and all it holds dear, or for some other very

sacred cause (for instance, to throw off the yoke of a tyrant or to win its right to worship God as it pleases), may and ought to call constantly and even publicly on the name of the Most High for help. But when this is done by a nation which has deliberately and unprovoked, and merely in order to increase its own power and riches, attacked another peaceable neighbour, it is simply the most blasphemous hypocrisy. Such hypocrisy the Prussians practised continually in 1870, as they are practising it in even more odious circumstances to-day. *Punch* was not far wrong when it parodied old King William's telegraphic messages to his wife during the 1870 campaign in the following words :

By grace divine, my dear Augusta,
We've had another awful buster !
Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below,
Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

You will observe, if you study the language which that monarch's grandson, the present Kaiser, holds, or is made by his military friends to hold, that he speaks as if he regarded himself as the junior (nay, almost as the senior) partner of Almighty God in the business of conquering what he calls 'effete nations'. We English, as Mr. William Watson wrote the other day in his fine sonnet, published in *The Times*,

We are not on such easy terms with Heaven
as the Kaiser and his gang. But we and the French and Belgians are fighting a defensive war, if ever there was one in history ; and I think we should do well, whether we happen to be Protestants or Catholics, to be very often on our knees, both at home and in church, in all humility. The Germans seem to me to have got altogether the wrong brand of God, a sort of superior

War-Lord who delights to drink the blood of his enemies.

The result of the war of 1870-1 was exactly what Bismarck had intended to bring about, the proclamation of the new German Empire, with a federal council of princes, and a parliament, called the *Reichstag*, for the whole Empire, whose crown was to be hereditary on the head of the kings of Prussia. Henceforth the lesser States of Germany were simply vassals of Berlin; Berlin is the centre of the whole, and a very wicked, profligate, luxurious city it is, gorged with riches, yet seamed in places with the most horrible poverty, and with the largest population of habitual criminals of any European capital. The chief influence therein, after that of the group of Prussian soldiers, is that of the rich bankers, manufacturers, and shipowners, who have helped to make this present war because they thought it would fill their pockets. The rest of Germany has been steadily 'Prussianized'. 'Are these the fortifications of Dresden?' I once asked a dear old Saxon lady, who was taking me for a drive round the walls of the Saxon capital city; 'No, my dear,' she answered, 'these are the fortifications of Berlin.' But Prussia has spared no pains since then to conciliate all the other German States, and has given them an ample share of all the riches and power and influence that have poured in upon her since 1870; and the result has been that they have acquiesced in, and too many of them have even welcomed, their Prussification and have accepted the Prussian military ideal of 'conquest for conquest's sake'. This is what Bismarck instilled into them as the main duty of German men.

My own German friends of those days, merchants in Hamburg, professors in Dresden and Munich, school-

masters in several other places, had always hoped that the supreme position won in 1870 for their 'Fatherland' (which they all adore) would result in a century of peace, and in the cultivation of really friendly relations with all other European States, and especially with France and England; Russia, I am bound to admit, they always spoke of with fear—her vast size, her unlimited resources, her supposed Asiatic leanings, all combined to make her look like an ogre. But it has all gone just the other way. The magnitude, and the comparatively small cost, of the German victory of 1870 threw far too many Germans, even those outside the charmed circle of Prussian noblemen and financiers, very much off their balance. While some of them have said, 'We gained so much by the sword that we ought to have another try and gain a lot more in the same way,' others have said, 'We gained so much by the sword that it is impossible that we should keep it long, unless our sword is incessantly shaken in the faces of those whom we then robbed.' And so I am sure that the victory of 1870 has been, if we take its effects all round, a most disastrous thing for the German people. On France, on the other hand, the defeat, cruel as her suffering was at the time, has had a purifying effect, not unlike the effect that a far shorter period of suffering, in 1806–1815, had upon Prussia. The 'Second Empire' in France, namely, that of Napoleon III, was a very corrupt and a very frivolous period, and Paris was then almost as wicked a city as Berlin is now. Outwardly it has always been a frivolous-looking city, and French life has always seemed to sober English people too gay and pleasure-loving to be sound. But few English realize how deep and true, under the surface of wit and gaiety (and too often of profanity), French home-life has always been. Very few English

people know much about French homes, fewer still ever see inside them. In them the mother rules supreme, and French mothers, from peasant to duchess, are the best maternal race in Europe. Where good mothers rule, the nation will be sound. Governments may come and go, and their external forms may change, but the French and not the Germans are the heirs of old Rome, and their women are the true successors of those old Roman mothers, of whom their menfolk's highest praise was to say, 'She stayed at home, she span wool' (or, as we should say, 'she knitted socks').

From France the victorious Germans took in 1870 the very rich provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. This was no 'crime against nationality' or against history, as the partition of Poland had been. Both had been provinces of the old German Empire, and had been comparatively recent thefts by France, Alsace in 1648, half Lorraine in 1559, half as late as 1738. They were, and are, largely German in speech and race. Yet—what queer things national antipathies and national sympathies are!—their inhabitants were for the most part passionately attached to France, and if there was one thing they loathed in the world it was a Prussian. France had governed them most kindly, and had endeared herself to them by a thousand ties. Too well the Alsatians knew the cruel treatment they would receive from Prussia, and they were not wrong in their forecast. Something like one-quarter of the Alsatian population actually gave up their homes and settled in other French provinces, and for four-and-forty years Alsace has cried day and night to France to come and deliver her. You may have heard that over the Eastern Railway Station in Paris there stands a statue of the Alsatian capital city of Strassburg. Every year it has been

covered by pious hands with a new veil of crape to indicate the mourning city. When the present war began the Alsatians resident in Paris climbed to the roof of the building and tore off the veil ; and there the great gaunt stone woman stands bare to the autumn sky—the strange symbol of a German city, stretching out her hands to Frenchmen to come to liberate her from German tyranny. All attempts to Prussianize Alsace have been utterly in vain ; not quite so wholly vain have been the Prussian operations on Lorraine. Besides taking these two provinces, the Germans demanded the payment from the French Republic of the huge sum of two hundred and forty millions sterling. They thought that the loss of such a sum would ruin France for ever ; as a matter of fact, she raised it within a year from the peace. ‘Oh!’ said the Prussians, quite disgusted at this proof of their beaten enemy’s resources and frugality, ‘next time we will make them pay two thousand millions, we will bleed them white.’

You will naturally say : Why did we, and why did Austria and Russia, not come to the help of France ? Well, Austria for her part had been far too hard hit in 1866, and had, besides, little reason to love Napoleon III, who had done nothing to save her then. Russia was lulled to sleep by Bismarck’s skilful phrases, and believed, foolishly enough, that her interests were more German than French. But England ? Well, it must be confessed we too had little reason to love the scheming old French Emperor, and in those days no special reason for loving the new French Republic. Germany had as yet no fleet, her interests did not seem to cross ours anywhere in particular. ‘If either of you attack Belgium,’ we said both to France and Germany at the beginning of the war, ‘it will at once bring us in’ ; and it is quite

probable that Mr. Gladstone, who was then Prime Minister, would have felt obliged to strike for Belgium. But Bismarck was far too prudent to incur this risk, and was wise enough to leave Belgium severely alone. Gladstone also had too little conception of the permanent duty of England to uphold the weak against the strong; he knew nothing about foreign countries except Italy, and he had, in fact, no real grasp of the map of Europe, no foresight into the dangers of the future. So we said in a magnificent kind of way that the war was 'no concern of ours'—as if *any* great upheaval in Western Europe could leave England unconcerned!

From that hour France has set herself to reorganize her national existence. She has gone into training, like an athlete who has been badly beaten in one great race because he was out of training when called upon to run. In particular she has revived the memory of the 'Maid sent from God whose name was Jeanne', who delivered her in the fifteenth century from the cruel conquest of her northern provinces by our King Henry V. We English called that Maid 'Joan of Arc', and, to our lasting shame, being unable to beat her in the field, we caught her and burned her as a witch in the market square at Rouen. A few days ago I saw a photograph of a band of English Red-Cross nurses grouped round the pedestal of her statue which stands on the place of her martyrdom. 'I will go and save my brave friends of Compiègne,' the Maid once cried, and it was in going to save them that she was captured. Did not her spirit hover over that forest of Compiègne a few days ago and protect the descendants of her former English foes, when English cavalry made that wonderful charge upon the German guns and captured ten of them? For my part I believe that,

whenever French soldiers have charged their enemies on French soil for France's sake, they have seen in their imagination the Maid in full armour riding at their head.

But France has also been scrupulously careful to avoid giving any sort of offence, or any cause of quarrel on which the Germans, ever watchful to seize some pretext, could fasten. Every time France has seemed to be growing too strong Germany has tried hard to pretend that she was in some way wronged ; France has turned the deafest and politest of ears. I don't for a moment say that, if at any time Frenchmen had felt that they *were* absolutely ready, they would not have picked up the glove Germany tossed at them ; but they would never have tossed the glove at Germany themselves. And it is only too evident that the French army was not as ready even as Frenchmen hoped when this war began six weeks ago.

This patient, honourable attitude of France, under the most dire provocation, has gained for her not only the respect and admiration of the lesser States of Europe, but also the friendship and alliance, first of Russia, then of England. In the minds of all three of these nations the conviction has been growing, for several years past, that Germany has merely been waiting a favourable opportunity to spring upon us, yes, upon all three of us, either at the same moment or one after the other ; and we have realized that in a quiet, and always defensive, union between our three selves both our honour and our truest interest lay. I need not go into the details or the dates of the several ' quaking fits ' into which Germany has thrown us since 1870 ; the first was in 1875, the last in 1911. That last is burned into my mind by a curious experience ; in the August of that year I was returning from Iceland in a Danish steamer,

and, when we touched at the Faroe Isles on the voyage home, we were told that news had just been received that Germany had declared war on Great Britain. You may imagine what an uncomfortable three days we had till we got into Leith, and learned that the danger had been spirited away, and the contest deferred for three precious years, by the skill and patience of our present Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey. And what Europe owed then to his skill is as nothing compared to what it owes to his firmness, his loyalty, to-day. I think his name will go down to history linked with that of Queen Elizabeth, who for twenty years by her patient diplomacy averted the danger from Spain, till her sailors were strong enough to encounter the Spanish Armada, and with that of Lord Castlereagh, who had to face the incredibly difficult task of making, and then keeping together, the union of the jealous monarchs of Austria, Prussia, and Russia from 1812 till the final overthrow of Napoleon three years later.

In the second part of this paper I shall hope to show in rather more detail what the real aims of the rulers of Germany, when they began this war, actually were.

C. R. L. F.

OXFORD, *Sept. 9, 1914.*